

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson****“Cover Blown: Did TSA Tip Off Airport Screeners about Covert Testing?”**

November 14, 2007 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled “Cover Blown: Did TSA Tip Off Airport Screeners about Covert Testing?”:

“The Air Transport Association estimates that 27 million people will fly worldwide over the next twelve days. Since September 11th, the government has asked a lot of the public in the name of security.

Even as I speak, air travelers across the nation are waiting in long security lines; taking off their shoes, hats and coats; putting their miniature toothpaste and shampoo in a plastic bags; even throwing perfectly good water bottles into the trash. The public has accepted these inconveniences because our government says it will lead to safer skies.

So when we have TSA management tipping off airport security officials about covert testing, we have a credibility and accountability problem. When I assumed the Chairmanship of this Committee, I pledged to hold the Department of Homeland Security accountable for developing a roadmap to genuine security – one that provides Americans freedom from fear. Our government cannot play on our fears of an attack and then try to “cheat” its way through its mid-term exams.

The public has accepted increased scrutiny at our airports. In turn, the public also demands the same scrutiny of the Department – and in this case of TSA.

That is why we are holding this hearing today – to ask TSA to explain why, on April 28, 2006, it used a system-wide communication system, NETHUB, to give more than 650 aviation security officials a head's up about a “POSSIBLE SECURITY TEST.”

This email, which was provided to this Committee by a member of the media and verified by my staff, said that “several airport authorities and airport police departments have recently received informal notice” of security testing “at airports around the nation.” The email detailed several methods that were being used to attempt to breach airport security, and even gave a brief description of some of the testers. The email concluded: “We are getting the word out.” But the “word” was not supposed to “get out.” Covert testing of airport security is supposed to be just that – covert.

It is hard to overstate the importance of this type of testing; it is a crucial part of the

layered defense that protects our nation's commercial aviation system.

Covert testers are out there trying to expose gaps before a terrorist does, and if someone at TSA undermines this testing, they are undermining aviation security as a whole. This Committee is tasked by Congress to conduct oversight of the Department of Homeland Security, its organization, and particularly transportation security programs. Today's hearing is just the first step in my Committee's investigation into this issue.

To date, TSA has been cooperative with my staff, and I trust that this cooperation will continue. I hope that at the end of the road we can say that this was an isolated incident, but we will follow this investigation wherever it takes us.

The flying public deserves no less."

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Please contact Dena Graziano or Todd Levett at (202) 225-9978

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176, Ford House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515
Phone: (202) 226-2616 | Fax: (202) 226-4499
<http://homeland.house.gov>